



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

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To: Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, Mayor
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From: Jon W. Fullinwider

Subject: **ELECTION NIGHT PROCESSING**

Given the recent issues raised by members of the public regarding the operational integrity of the vote counting system used by the Registrar Recorder (Registrar), I took the opportunity to spend several hours at the Registrar's Norwalk vote counting location to observe first hand and look at the technology used. During the course of the evening, I also had several conversations with members of the public who had expressed concerns with the process and the use of computer equipment to count and tally votes from over 5000+ polling locations across the 4000+ square miles.

First impressions – WOW! I arrived around 10:30PM to the “thump, thump, thump” of the helicopters staged for landing and take-off. It immediately brought back images of my days in Vietnam when we were entering and exiting a landing zone under fire. As the helicopters landed, fireproof bags of ballots from all over the County were unloaded and brought to a check-in station where they were scanned twice and recorded as being received and in the building. From the check-in station, they were taken to an area where hundreds of high school students and kids under the care of DCFS opened thousands of “red” ballot boxes that had been sealed by the volunteers working the polling locations after the polls closed. The ballots were scanned and logged in preparation for vote counting in the next room. Considering these kids were all volunteers and trained the same day, while there were hundreds of them, with “red” boxes everywhere, the operation was amazingly well organized with everyone seeming to know what they were doing!

Once the precinct ballots were logged, they were staged in long trays and sent to the vote counting area where the ballots are read and tallied. This is where members of the public had expressed concerns with the integrity of the vote counting process. At a meeting I attended last week, the Registrar and staff had spent almost two hours allowing concerned members of the public to look at all the computer equipment being used to count ballots and answer questions as to how the equipment was networked, backed-up, who had access to it, how it was configured, types of internal ports, etc.

As the County CIO, I was truly impressed with the caliber of the Registrar's technology staff. Not only did they do a very good job in answering questions, they had clearly spent a significant amount of time putting in place a very viable and robust vote counting system. They had isolated the vote counting equipment on a separate network that did not connect to any other network (inside or outside of the building). This action alone, ensured a high degree of integrity as there is no ability to gain/hack access into the vote counting system from any public or private network (i.e., Internet, phone line, etc.). This was clearly a major concern of those members of the public in attendance, as they felt it would pose a major breach of security leading to some type of unauthorized access effecting vote tally results. However, when they realized that there was no outside access, this left them to ponder what could be done if someone could gain physical access to the vote counting equipment within the isolated/controlled network environment. This would require access to equipment in a locked room with Sheriff Deputies guarding the door and validating that only appropriate County staff had access. Additionally, prior to and after the vote counting process was started/completed, each counting device was formally validated to ensure it was counting correctly.

Bottom-line, while you could write a novel on all the possibilities that could exist to effect the integrity of vote counting using computers, as relates to the County of Los Angeles, there is no way a member of the public could gain access, remotely, to the Registrar's vote counting system (as it is currently designed and operated) to make the necessary software changes that would be required to impact the integrity of the vote counting process or tally results. While the Registrar has taken prudent actions in the design and operation of the vote counting equipment, the added (and very critical) layer of physical security (separate physical room, controlled staff access, electronic doors, Sheriff Deputies monitoring access to the vote counting area, etc.) all work toward ensuring the operational integrity that should lead to a very high degree of public confidence in the vote counting process.

In the actual vote counting room, staffed by 50-60 ISD/ITS personnel who operate the vote counting equipment under the management and supervision of Registrar staff, it was notable to observe how well organized and controlled the process was. As I walked through the various ballot processing areas at the Norwalk facility, each with a unique function, I was left with the impression that the whole vote counting process had been well planned and thought out. Given the complexity of all the tasks required to ensure an accurate and timely vote tally, it was striking to see the simplicity of actions necessary to ensure success. As the Registrar and staff talked about the various processes, it made sense and did not require a white board to describe it!

The Primary Election conducted on June 6, 2006 was a success. Technology played a key role in the counting process and was accomplished with absolute integrity. To think that we would not use technology is beyond comprehension. To believe that technology will not be more pervasive in future elections would not be realistic. Clearly technology will be essential to the success of future elections. And while there will be those that are critical of technology, the issue, in and of itself, is not the technology, but rather the management of technology, understanding of the safeguards required and ensuring the same degree of commitment to the voters of Los Angeles County that we have made for over 156 years. MY COMPLIMENTS FOR A GREAT JOB TO ALL INVOLVED IN MAKING JUNE 6, 2006 A NIGHT TO REMEMBER!

JWF:ygd

c: IT Board Deputies
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Dave Lambertson, Director, ISD
Conny B. McCormack, Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk
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